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THE VOICE OF LABOR.

A WORD TO

SOME WORKINGMEN.

BY

ROBERT P. PORTER,

Author of "Bread-Winners Abroad," "Free-Trade Folly," "The West in 1880," "Protection and Free Trade To-day," etc.

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The present is not a time for withdrawing Protection, in view of the increase of wages demanded all along the line.

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THE PROTEST OF LABOR.

WHILE labor throughout the country is organizing for the purpose of securing shorter hours of work for the same wages, or higher wages for the same work, and various other advantages, the United States Congress has pending a tariff bill which, if passed, would turn over to foreign countries, especially to Belgium, Germany, and England, a large portion of several of the most steady of our home industries. Should Congress pass this law, it would undoubtedly do much toward settling the present difficulties between capital and labor, by importing the products of foreign labor and leaving American labor in idleness.

In the two weeks of hearings accorded the great industries of the country by the Ways and Means Committee, one day was devoted exclusively to the testimony of the labor interests. I was present in the committee room during all these hearings, and must confess that none of them impressed me so much as the workingman pleading with the Congressional Committee not to reduce his wages and lower his condition to that of the European workman. Said Mr. William Weihe, President of the Amalgamated Association of Iron and Steel Workers, a puddler, of Pittsburgh, "We believe that if this measure becomes a law, this forced idleness on the part of workmen will increase, and for that reason we come and ask you to make no change in the tariff. The workingmen of this country are receiving a bare livelihood; but, if their wages are to be still further reduced,

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they will not get a livelihood." This witness told the committee that he knew of mills where the men are idle on account of the agitation of the tariff. In these cases their families were suffering.

EIGHTY THOUSAND WORKMEN OPPOSED TO THE BILL.

The protest from the Amalgamated Association of Iron and Steel Workers was read by the secretary of that association, Mr. William Martin, of Pittsburgh. Among other things this document, signed as it was by the representatives of this association of workmen, numbering eighty thousand, says: "We are unalterably opposed to any revision of the present tariff, except such revision as tends to higher rates than are now obtained, and from *ad valorem* to specific duties." It furthermore said: "We believe in encouraging in every possible way, and at all times, and in all places, American industries, and the purchase and use of American products, in preference to imported goods." One expression in this document struck me as particularly apt, namely, "Nipping a little off tariff duties year after year will ultimately end in free-trade." And further, "Trades and labor organizations in this country have refrained from political action as organizations, but if the tendency to fritter away the bulwark which has so far enabled the members to obtain good wages is continually agitated, they will, perforce, be compelled to take political action, with a view to protecting themselves and their trade." This shows that there exists among the trades and labor organizations of this country a wholesome sentiment on the tariff question, and with the present dangerous measure pending in Congress, it seems that the moment has arrived for these organizations to assert themselves in order to protect themselves. Mr. Andrew Stewart, another puddler, of Allegheny City, addressed the committee, and pointed out the effects of the

revenue tariff of 1846, which, he said, in two years closed up almost every iron mill in the United States. "For two years," he said, "following the reduction of duties by that tariff bill, the grass grew on the floors of the mills in Pittsburgh. Like results come from like causes. Now, we, who have been in the business, know from experience that every reduction in the tariff is a reduction in our wages, and not only a reduction in our wages, but in the wages of the mass of workmen in the United States, Therefore we say that it is for our benefit that the tariff shall not be reduced at present, but rather that the duties shall be put up if possible."

THE BILL A DIRECT BLOW AT WAGES.

Another workman, Mr. Thomas Williams of Youngstown, Ohio, said to the committee, "We believe that the American workingman will be deeply injured if you pass this measure; and I believe that you will also destroy, to a large extent, the power of the manufacturers of the country to pay us the wages we have been getting. As American citizens we cannot be compelled to exist upon what the working people of England, France, or other European countries exist on. We have a right to expect something different. The people of this country have made the country just what it is; and in a very great measure the workingmen have made it what it is, although some of you may take exception to that statement, for I understand that some gentlemen of this committee say that we must come to the level of labor in Europe. That idea is something which we must protest against." Another witness, Mr. Roger Evans of Ohio, said among other things, "Any party in this country who takes up with this foreign aristocratic sentiment, of undermining, of degrading, and of debasing the American workman, will be left, and will get completely snowed under the ballots of the American voters." Several of the free-

trade members of the committee attempted by every possible means to irritate the men who had come before them to represent the honest toil of the country, by intimating that the capitalists, not the workingmen, reaped the benefit of the protective tariff. In reply to one of these arguments, for they could hardly be said to be questions, in which a member of Congress pictured to Mr. Roger Evans the grasping character of the manufacturer, and contrasted his wealth and affluence with the meager pay of the workingman, Mr. Evans said, with creditable frankness, "We acknowledge that there are selfish men everywhere, and we know that we are unduly selfish ourselves sometimes. Labor organizations are sometimes unduly selfish; but I ask you, for pity's sake, to *let us fight this battle out among ourselves.*" The refrain of these men throughout the Ways and Means Committee hearing was, let us have the protective system throughout, in the interest of the entire American people—American manufactures for American people.

A MAN WHO BETTERED HIS CONDITION.

One of the most effective speakers who appeared before the committee was Mr. Thomas P. Jones, of Chicago, iron and steel worker. He said that he voiced the sentiment of three thousand workmen, young and old, employed in the same factory in which he was employed, and that they were totally opposed to any further tinkering with the tariff. He claimed that the representatives in Congress had no right to make the situation of labor worse than it is. Among other things, Mr. Jones said, "If you keep on lopping off here and there, taking protection first off this thing and then off that thing, the ultimate end aimed at is certainly free-trade and nothing else. I had the misfortune to be born in a free-trade country, and I was raised there in a sort of way; certainly to my loss. I never received any education. I came

to this country to better my condition, and I am happy to say that I have bettered my condition. I have made more wages than I ever made in the old country. We, as workingmen, claim that we are the power that sent you here; and claiming that, we do not look up to you as we were taught to look up to our lords and dukes across the water; but we look up to you as honorable upright American citizens, qualified and capable to come here and legislate for the best interests of the country. It has been shown here to-day that this tinkering with the tariff is not for the best interests of the country; is not for the best interests of the wealth-producers—of the men who have built up this country. Then, gentlemen, I take it that it is your duty to throw this bill to the dogs." Again Mr. Jones said, "Where I live, in Chicago, you would be surprised to see the feeling that exists among the working classes. And why? Because some of the people there worked in this country in free-trade times. I have a brother-in-law, who, in free-trade times, travelled to his work six miles in the morning, getting there at sunrise, worked all day, and walked home at sundown, and all for a paltry fifty cents a day. I also have worked for fifty cents a day, but not in this country, thank God. I have worked for twenty-five cents a day, but I do not want to do it again. I have seen in the city of Glasgow, in Scotland, men working for twelve cents a day and a bowl of soup. That does not become an American citizen. We cannot have such a state of things here, and we will not have it."

"A BIT OF BREAD FOR SUPPER."

Mr. Jones might have added here that at the present moment, in this same Glasgow, and around it there are thousands of people in just this same condition, glad to work for twelve cents a day and a bowl of soup. Here is what the Glasgow *Mail* says of the condition of the laboring classes of the Clyde:

"How do the unemployed keep themselves alive during months of enforced idleness? is a question that is in the mouth of every one acquainted with the terrible and long-continued depression that has been resting on the industries on our river for the last two or three years. One yard has been totally closed for months past; a large majority of those who have anything to do have about one-third or one-fourth the number of workmen capable of being employed when business is brisk. Only two yards—Messrs. John Elder & Co. and Messrs. Napier & Sons, Govan—have anything like a fair complement of work on hand, and, as a consequence of this state of matters, some thousands of men have been walking about our streets now for months on end unable to get a job of any kind. Pale-faced many of them, anxious-browed all of them, and seeing little or nothing to lead them to hope for a bettering of things, or to help them to tide over the quickly advancing winter, which always brings additional suffering and privations to the homes of the poor. 'How do they live?' Well, some people would say, if they understood all, that the idle workmen don't live at all; literally they feed upon the husks which the swine do eat. Their children have to beg, many of them, for their food, and any residenter in the neighborhood will tell you about the little hungry-looking creatures that tap at the door after dark—because begging is an infringement of the police act—and solicit 'a bit of bread for supper,' and it brings a lump to one's throat to see how the teeth of one of these hungry little ones close over a piece of warm buttered toast from the tea-table."

AMERICAN WORKMEN OPPOSED TO "LEGISLATIVE NAGGING."

Speaking of this continual worrying at the tariff, another representative of labor said, "Here, in less than three years, this same question is brought up again and is agitated, and

you are trying to crop a little of the duties off here and a little off there, with the ultimate view of breaking the system of protection up altogether. I cannot form any other idea about it. And I claim that the gentlemen who work in that line, with the sole idea of wiping out the protected industries in this country, have no feeling whatever for their fellow-men, not one particle." One of the members of the Committee attempted to prove that the working-classes in England were as well off as they were in the United States. But one of the workmen's delegation completely annihilated him by asking if he had ever been there; the member was obliged to admit that he had not, whereupon the witness, who happened to be an Englishman, said, "If you want to be convinced of the happiness of English working-people, you ought to go there. You ought to visit the nail factories in England, and see a mother with her child upon her back hammering away making a nail, working for the pitiful sum of three-and-sixpence a week. Gentlemen, you should not talk about the happiness and prosperity of the laboring classes of Great Britain unless you know something about it. I know something about it. You may go there and see."

GRAND MASTER POWDERLY'S VIEWS.

In addition to the above expressions of opinion from the laboring interests, we find that the great representative of the Knights of Labor, Mr. T. V. Powderly, is opposed to all legislation that proposes lower rates of duties on American products. I quote from a speech made by Mr. Powderly February 15, 1883, at the Cooper Union:

"Yet I am a high tariff man. I am a protectionist from the top of my head to the bottom of my boot, and I am not ashamed of it. You may ask me why I am? There are two reasons: The one is because I was born in Pennsylvania;

the other is because I am an American, and never in my life have I advocated, and so help me God, never in my life will I advocate, anything that tends to degrade American labor."

There is nothing hesitating about Mr. Powderly, and he has so recently shown himself to be made of such excellent material for a great leader of the labor interests, that his words must go a long way with his fellow-workmen.

Again Mr. Powderly said:

"Protect our commodities, our articles: we have the raw material to manufacture nearly everything we want. In the name of God and of the American people, protect it from one end of the land to the other. Let protection be the watchword." Mr. Powderly holds these views to-day, and before the Congressional committee a few days ago said that one of the objects of the Knights of Labor was to help manufacturers to pay the highest wages for their labor. How can they do this if the barriers between foreign labor and American labor are to be constantly lowered.

WHAT CONGRESS PROPOSES TO DO.

With these distinct and unmistakable words from the representatives of the labor interests of the country ringing in their ears, what does Congress propose to do?

It proposes to pass a bill which will seriously lower duties on many important articles, and place upon the free-list many important commodities produced in the United States. This bill among other things proposes to reduce the duty on woollen goods from thirty-five cents per pound and thirty-five per cent *ad valorem* to *thirty-five per cent ad valorem* and to reduce the duty on medium-priced worsteds, which now range from twelve to eighteen cents per pound, according to their value, and thirty-five per cent *ad valorem* to *thirty-five per cent ad valorem* only.

The bill now pending proposes also to reduce the duty on clothing made of worsted and of woollen goods from forty

cents per pound and thirty-five per cent *ad valorem*, which is the present duty, to *thirty-five per cent ad valorem* only. Clothing of all descriptions will, therefore, if this bill is passed by Congress, have from five cents per pound to twenty-three cents a pound less protection compared with the goods out of which they are made than they have under the present tariff, and cloaks, dolmans, etc., etc., will have from ten cents to twenty-eight cents per pound and five per cent *ad valorem* less protection compared with the price of goods out of which they are made than they have under the present tariff. A protection of thirty-five per cent only is not sufficient to compensate the American manufacturer of woollen and worsted goods for the great difference in price of labor between this country and Europe, and, consequently, by far the greater proportion of woollen goods used for making up clothing and cloaks will be made in Europe. As there is no difference whatsoever between the duty on cloaks and clothing and the goods out of which they are made, and as the wages paid tailors, cutters, trimmers, etc., etc., are so much higher here than they are in Germany, clothing and cloaks made in this country will not be able to compete with those made in Europe.

Although the new tariff bill proposes to reduce so much the duty on clothing, cloaks, etc., it is not proposed to make any change in the duty of many of the trimmings, such as silk, braid, velvets, silk linings, sewing silk, etc., which are required to make up clothing, cloaks, etc.

The duty on many of these articles is really higher than the proposed duty on clothing, cloaks, etc., will be if the bill now under consideration in Congress becomes a law.

A DIRECT BLOW AT LABOR.

The effect of this reduction upon hundreds of thousands of tailors, tailoresses, seamstresses, cloak-makers, cutters, trimmers and others engaged in making clothing and woollen garments of all kinds it will be impossible to foretell. The census returns of 1880 give the number of per-

sons engaged in these and similar industries at 420,000. It is estimated by competent authorities that not less than half a million men and women are employed in making garments of various kinds to clothe this population of 57,000,000. A large proportion of these hard-working people will be deprived of their occupation should this bill become a law.

In six months after its passage new factories for making ready-made clothing of all kinds will be started in Berlin, in Bremen, in Elberfeld, in Leipsic, in Aachen and in Franfort-on-the-Main.

And why?

Because, according to the official reports sent by the United States Consuls from those places to the State Department at Washington, the wages for tailors are forty-seven cents, fifty cents, forty-eight cents, fifty-six cents, sixty cents and fifty cents, respectively, per day of twelve hours' work.

Because, according to those same official reports, the German workman and workwoman live on the coarsest black bread, wear the cheapest garments and wooden shoes, and live in a condition generally that no American workman or workwoman can or ought to live in.

It may be urged that the patterns of clothing differ greatly in this country, and that would be an obstacle. I am assured by those who know that this is easily obviated. The patterns would be made in this country and sent across the Atlantic, and there the cloth would be cut. It would therefore leave the American cutter without occupation or reduce his wages to the level of the European cutter, whose wages rarely reach more than a dollar a day, and are sometimes less. The average weekly wages of tailors in Austria are for foreman six dollars per week; piece workers, four dollars per week; day workers (male) per week, four dollars and forty cents; day workers (female), three dollars and sixty cents.

It may well be asked how do workmen live on such wages. The answer is simply because they do not live as well as the

laboring classes do in America. Every member of the family works. Women perform the hardest manual work. Unless the working men and women of our cities who will be thus affected by the Tariff bill now pending in Congress at once file their protests with the members of Congress from their district, as I have shown the representatives of some of the important industries have already done, with the Ways and Means Committee, the passage of the bill will be secured and the labor of American tailors, cloak-makers, cutters, trimmers, etc., will be open to European competition at the rates given above.

Few workingmen realize the ruin and desolation a bill of this kind will bring to their homes. Three quarters of the woollen goods manufactured in this country are sold to the wholesale cloak and clothing houses which abound in our large cities.. The bulk of this business will be turned over to European houses; and, to save themselves, American firms will be compelled to start branch houses on the other side, where they can take advantage of the labor of tailors paid at fifty cents per day. The pending danger is a real one. It means to the American worker of our large cities less wages, less to eat, less to wear, less to clothe and educate his family, and perhaps idleness and starvation. The iron workers comprehended this, and they compelled Congress to throw their industry out of the list for destruction; the coal-miners went before the committee with their protests, and coal was returned to the dutiable list; the miners of iron ore plead their cause, and they won the day. The same is true of the Amalgamated Iron and Steel Association. The committee representing that Association made an earnest appeal, and it was decided to spare the metal schedule. A committee of working potters appeared before the Congressional Committee, and that industry is to be let alone. It now remains for the cloak-makers, the tailors, the cutters and the trimmers in their great industry to make that appeal. It is now too late to go before the committee, but if those inter-

ested will at once send protests to their members of Congress and if the workmen's clubs and Knights of Labor assemblies in all the large cities will at once pass resolutions conforming with the views of their colleagues as given above, and with those expressed by Grand Master Powderly, this vicious measure to degrade American labor may yet be defeated.

WHAT THE KNIGHTS OF LABOR HAVE ACCOMPLISHED.

Last week the laboring interests of Philadelphia and New Jersey sent delegations to Washington in the interests of cotton spinners and woollen spinners and weavers. One of these protests had the names of four thousand workingmen. The protests of the Knights of Labor against the free-ship bill now pending in Congress have also been very effectual. The voice of the workingman should be heard at Washington *at once* against the tariff reduction, and especially against the proposition to destroy the manufacturer of ready-made clothing in the United States. I have shown what the wages are in Germany. It is unnecessary to tell those engaged in the industry here what they are paid. It is enough to say that the American workman and workwoman will starve if compelled to receive the foreign rate. The result is therefore inevitable. The large concerns will transfer their plants to the other side of the Atlantic, while the smaller factories will be pushed to the wall.

LET THE LABOR INTERESTS RALLY.

There is but one course to pursue. Let the laboring interests take this matter up. Let them demand that no discrimination be made between the different industries in which the people are employed. Let the platform be protection to all industries in which American labor is employed, whether agricultural, mechanical, mining, or manufacturing.

To take any other ground means certain destruction, for the plan of the enemy of American industry is to divide our forces; to divide the hitherto firm ranks of our own great industries, and by bringing discord among them conquer them in detail. What share of the profits labor shall have and what share shall accrue to capital is a family question. For the moment capital and labor have a common enemy to fight in the shape of the agents of our foreign industrial rivals, who are pressing both vigorously. Added to this, the news comes from Washington that President Cleveland and the entire administration have come out on the side of the free-traders, and will use all their power to secure the passage of the tariff bill, and crush the laboring interests of the country and destroy home industries. The plea for doing this is the old one—to cheapen the workman's clothing. And they propose to do this by robbing him of the means to buy by reducing his wages to the European standard. Let the voice of labor be heard in the halls of Congress, in the Senate chamber, and in the White House itself. The danger is imminent. There is no time to lose, or the damage will be done. The post-offices and Federal patronage of the government have been thrown into the scale against labor, and Democrats refusing to vote for the bill are to be driven out of the party. Let the workingmen of America rally around the men who have their cause at heart, regardless of political faith.

COMMENTS OF THE PRESS.

New York Sun.

". . . They convey with terseness and perspicuity much valuable information concerning the rise and present status of many British industries."

Newark Advertiser.

"Mr. Porter's letters are replete with facts and figures that positively prove his conclusions. . . . His reputation as a reliable statistician is too well known to require any extended notice."

Hartford Evening Post.

"A well-written book, that ought to be read by everybody, especially by manufacturers and workingmen."

Utica Herald.

"No person can claim to speak intelligently on industrial matters in comparison with Great Britain or on industrial legislation, without careful examination of the instructive truths embodied in 'Bread Winners Abroad.'"

The National Tribune.

"Since Horace Greeley we have had no writer with the gift of popularizing economic questions in the clear and forcible style that characterizes Mr. Porter's work."

From the Des Moines Register.

"It is a pity that everybody in America and especially the workingmen cannot read these letters."

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From the Times-Democrat (New Orleans).

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From the Cleveland Leader.

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"'Bread Winners Abroad' is from the pen of Robert P. Porter, widely and favorably known as an earnest advocate of protection to American labor."

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